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ABSTRACT

In 1990, in response to court orders, Kentucky took the unprecedented step of throwing out the state's entire public educational system. Using outside consultants, they fashioned a model for education reform that many experts have hailed as the best in the United States. The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) has become a beacon of hope for a nation working to revitalize its classrooms. The progress of school reform in Kentucky is traced through the experiences of a superintendent, a principal, and a teacher in the Henderson County public schools. These protagonists were all activists who believed in the reform effort and dedicated themselves to it. Their experiences illustrate one of the more sobering lessons of school reform efforts. Even with real commitment and hard work, achieving broad-based reform is nearly impossible. In Kentucky, opponents of school reform began to make headway in 1994, Although they did not change the focus of the educational reform law, they continued challenging the state's goal to help all students achieve at high levels, arguing that such efforts would weaken the curriculum. The KERA was hailed throughout the United States, but it didn't inspire such great enthusiasm at home, where most people thought that the schools were already doing enough. The experiences of these educators demonstrate that reform is only possible when the people want it. Real change is only possible when the citizens believe in its necessity and possibility. (Contains 71 references.) (SLD)

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